

THE GLORY OF  
THE NIGHTINGALES

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

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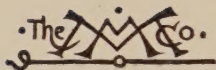
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*The Glory of the Nightingales*



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# The Glory of the Nightingales

By

*Edwin Arlington Robinson*



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The Macmillan Company

1930

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TO THE MEMORY OF  
ALFRED H. LOUIS

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*The Glory of the Nightingales*



## THE GLORY OF THE NIGHTINGALES

### I

WITH a long way before him there to Sharon,  
And a longer way from Sharon to the sea,  
Alone with an invisible companion  
That was a valediction and a vengeance,  
There were no further leagues or weary hours  
Worth reckoning; for after years of hours,  
And hours of years, the way ahead of him  
Was like a line drawn surely, to be followed  
With no great haste and with no hesitation,  
Through time to silence. At the end of time  
There would be Nightingale, and his last song—  
A noxious and inevitable jest  
That like a soft-winged insect at his ear  
Fluttered and clung, or flew away from him,  
Only to come once more. Weary of that,  
And of a sun that burned the firmament,  
He rested underneath a wayside oak  
That he remembered. He was far from home  
Or from a place that once had such a name,  
Though not so far now as to be a stranger  
To things familiar and so long forgotten  
As not to be the same, or quite so large.  
The way from here to there was not so long  
As in his youth he would have measured it;

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

The trees and hills and houses that he found  
Were not so high ; and hours that once had held  
So large a rationing of the time of life  
Were not so large or long. He might perhaps  
Have counted them as longer than they were,  
But for a fever in the certainty  
Of what he sought. When once he had found that,  
And had it, hours might have their way with him,  
Or cease. With his work done so righteously,  
Dying would not be much to pay for death,  
Which was attuned and indispensable  
To quivering destiny. No surer part  
Was yet assigned to man for a performance  
Than one that was for Malory, who must act,  
Or leave the stage a failure.

### For the present

All his wealth was in a purpose and a weapon,  
All his purpose a removal of one being  
Whose inception and existence was an error,  
By fate repudiated and presented  
To Malory for extinction. Nightingale  
Had robbed him long ago of all the rest,  
And with a smiling insolence not human  
Had watched him crawling maimed out of a wreck  
That had been life. There was no life since then;  
For man, even if divine, is mechanism  
While he is here, and so is not himself

## *Part First*

If much of him be broken. Nightingale  
Had shattered Malory, and as autumn waits  
Unfailingly for summer to be done,  
There was a story waiting to be told  
By Malory, who believed he knew the peak  
And issue of it—like so many of us  
Whose knowing is belief, and whose belief  
Is a determination to believe,  
Whether in God, or in deflated friends,  
Or in ourselves. If we believe enough  
In something—none shall tell another what—  
That 's ours to do, we are glad to be alive,  
As Malory was, to do it. For some years  
He had closed his eyes at night infallibly  
On the same swift and satisfying picture  
That in the morning would awaken him  
Like a strong voice, or like a strong hand laid  
Heavily on him, or like a bell struck once  
To make him leap and think, and ask of life  
What soiled and veiled necessity of space  
Was there somewhere appointed and permitted  
For one who must not live. Somewhere alive  
He was; and when time whispered where he was,  
Malory's part would be to smile and heed  
And listen, and to follow and perform.  
The larger doings of mortality  
Must honor their importance to be done  
Becomingly and right, as a seed grows

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

To a green shoot and so to a round flower.  
The fiery-flying stars are in no haste,  
And seen from here are still. So Malory's  
Undying and unimpeded inspiration  
Might have been watched and read by any of us,  
As through the immeasurable distances  
That are between the nearest and most known  
Of loving and unfathomable strangers,  
For patience, calm and kind. Patient it was,  
As lightning is, or as volcanoes are  
That are already alive with fire and death.

Patience under an oak, there by the road  
That wound and climbed a silent way to Sharon,  
Would then have been about what a wayfarer,  
Passing him, might have said was Malory.  
If he had paused, and tarried for a while,  
He might have found a man somewhat the worse  
For wear within, and not unworn without—  
One of the passable and unprosperous  
To whom life clings; and might have said of him:  
"There was a man I found one afternoon  
Under an oak. He was a gracious man,  
Who must once have had more to do with life  
Than he was doing when I found him there.  
He was a man of dreams more than of deeds—  
Dreams that had not abundantly come true.  
Disaster, manifest all over him,

## *Part First*

Covered and held him like another skin  
That was itself another nakedness,  
To him, I trust, invisible. His eyes  
Were kind, and bright enough; they were almost  
Too bright for eyes that were so tired of seeing  
No ships come in. For there was fire behind  
Their light, and it would be there for some time  
Before there was defeat. Meanwhile disaster,  
Which is another name for something else,  
Sat with him while we talked, under that oak,  
And talked with me. Disaster was adept  
In courtesy, and as I discovered soon,  
In learning beyond mine. His history  
He kept untold, more than to tell me once  
He was a doctor—which was partly why  
He sat in the shade. He smiled, saying that to me,  
And saying it, smiled no more. And there I left him,  
Alone, to ponder on the Lord knows what."

Could Malory then have heard and seen himself  
So passively presented, and in words  
That were so near to an obituary,  
He might have conjured up another smile  
To pay a stranger for his penetration.  
Few would have seen so much as that of him,  
And fewer, seeing it, would have guessed how little  
It was they saw. We should not all sleep well,  
If night revealed to us our ignorance

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Of others whose intents and evidences,  
Errors and excellences, we have assayed  
And tabulated. How many a one we meet  
Would somewhat rather see us in a coffin,  
Is not a thought for any far pursuit  
On our part; and of all men, Nightingale  
Would have disowned it and forgotten it  
As an ingenious waste of meditation  
In his impressive mansion by the sea—  
A mausoleum that had been his dream  
Until he had it. Now he had sea and mansion,  
And having them had nothing. He had lost,  
Like many in winning, more than he had won;  
And he was lonelier there than one man left  
On a well-furnished island. Nightingale  
Had broken Malory, and was now alone  
With his advantages and was believing,  
Or saying so to himself, that he had acted  
As a man must who is too strong to choose—  
A pearl of his invention, therefore lusted  
Not like a real one. He had always carried  
More of a thwarted vision, and more wisdom,  
Lost in himself, than an alluring world  
Would let him use; and all being so adjusted,  
It was ingratitude for Malory  
To meddle with fate in any such thankless way  
As his had been; for with his dream of healing,  
And his foreshadowed confirmation of it,

## *Part First*

He should have recognized, with no romance  
Misleading him, his way that was appointed.  
A man by nature dedicated only  
To nature's hard submission, should have paid  
The price of higher service—failing which,  
Now there was nothing of him but a name  
Of one forgotten. Where he was not forgotten,  
He was among the most of all unenvied  
Who have survived their dreams. It was a story  
Of a worm boring in a noble tree,  
And one there was no need of saying over:  
Nature, that made the tree, had made the worm,  
And Nightingale was not responsible.

Though his name, as a name treasured, was forgotten,  
And his neighborhood was now not anywhere,  
Malory felt that home was mocking him  
In scenes and silences. He walked along,  
Seeing everywhere familiar sights and landmarks,  
And everywhere an insolence of change  
That almost angered him, until he thought  
How far change was from caring what he thought,  
Or what he was, or whether he was alive  
Or not alive. If there were a few left  
To meet with more constraint than interest  
An unimportant prodigal returning  
In his adversity to the wrong town,  
They would ask how he was, and having passed him,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

They would look back at him and shake their heads;  
They would remember how he had betrayed them,  
And hurt their faith. Where friends have sown their faith,  
And waited amiably for a late harvest,  
Only success deceives; and one man gone  
From Sharon would be tragedy as lasting  
As one bee missing from a hive, perhaps.

But Malory sought neither faith nor welcome  
From one alive, and he had none to give,  
Or to inflict, in Sharon, on the living.  
He had not come to parley with the living,  
And he would not be long there with the dead —  
Though she must hear him. She must know at last  
That he was doing well, and hear him say so,  
And she must give him thanks. Omnipotence  
Had erred enough already in fashioning  
His best friend as the devil, and would surely  
Grant him a word with one the devil had slain  
As venomously as any snake in darkness.  
There was only Nightingale who came alive  
Out of that darkness; therefore she must know  
That fate was on its way to Nightingale.  
Malory was too patient and sustained  
In his malevolence to be mistaken.  
He had not come so far to come for nothing,  
He had been told the way for him to take.  
Assurance, hovering like a benediction,

## *Part First*

Had been his one companion. He was right,  
Or nothing was right—in which complexity,  
All might as well have the same end together.  
It was almost a pity that in his arm  
There was not power enough to dislocate  
Creation. He felt and heard from silent places  
A murmur as of all things mocking him  
And his assurance as he moved along,  
Which may have been a remnant left in him  
Of an ancestral fear. He would not ask  
Of silence what it was, for while his work  
Was there ahead of him, it was not done.  
When that was done, there would be nothing left  
Worth asking, for the answer would be there;  
The seed of a rich purpose would have grown  
To the round flower of its accomplishment.

Agatha would be glad when all was over;  
For even in that last hillside house of hers,  
She must be troubled and humiliated  
That he should wait so long, who had not known  
At what precarious and intense a temper  
The metal of his machinery was made.  
Passion for what he sought had worn the face  
Of patience, and had fooled him to endure  
The wingless crawl of time in his pursuit  
And conquest of invisible destroyers;  
And when the mask had crumbled, and was gone,

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Pursuit had gone mysteriously with it,  
So that henceforward there was nothing left  
Of Malory but some primitive wheels and springs,  
Wound still to go till he was tired of them,  
And of their ticking. Now there was no need  
Of more oblivion, or excess, or nonsense—  
Now that he saw, now that he was awake,  
Now that he was alive. He was a king,  
Whose word was life or death; and it was death.

## II

WITH a wealth beyond a mortal estimation,  
And not heavy, though it had the weight of doom,  
He had come from other cities there to Sharon,  
Where a woman had been left too long alone.  
So it was time for him to think of twilight,  
Before there was an end of a long day;  
For the sun would soon be drowned in its own fire,  
Like a burning ship that, sinking, burns the sea.  
Now it was time to find the road below him,  
Outside the town—the town he would not enter  
Till Agatha had heard him and been happy  
To know that ruin for him had not been waste.  
Agatha must be told. They would be there  
Alone together, and science would have no eye  
To censure them. There was no science left  
In Sharon since her going away from him  
So quietly, so forgetful of what life  
Had done; and there was none left anywhere,  
While Nightingale was left.

With his arms folded,  
And his eyes watching long across a valley  
More than was there, and across more than valleys,  
Malory would have had a brief regard  
For any such foreign shaft of observation  
As chance or curiosity might have aimed  
At him in passing; and he would have felt it

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

As a post feels a fly. When he had watched  
Enough, or seen that watching would reveal  
Only what he had found, he moved along,  
And soon was on a lower road that led him  
Nearer than he could yet believe he was  
To one of those three places he had come  
So far to find. Two of them were so near  
That he could see them, or see where they were,  
For it was not a long way now to Sharon;  
And even that last of ways would be no longer  
Than a way there was from Sharon to the sea.

When he found himself a stranger in the silence  
Of a city whose inhabitants were names,  
He wandered, pausing, on his way to hers.  
It was the last time he should ever see it,  
And it was there. It would be waiting for him,  
And it would understand why he came slowly,  
For the last time. There was no science in that;  
There was only a discreet benevolence  
Of nature in his not having to make haste  
Where death was leading him, and following him.  
He could see death whenever he chose to look  
Over his shoulder; for he felt him there,  
And there was no need of seeing him too soon.  
There were names all the way to Agatha's  
For him to see; and death was, like himself,  
Making no haste that day.

## *Part Second*

Where it might come  
Through many trees, there was late sunlight lying  
On graves and grass; and everywhere a silence  
Was like the coming of peace after pain.  
He wondered if the dead were grateful for it,  
And hoped they were. He was as far today  
As ever he was from knowing more about it.  
All that was best for him to know today  
Was only that she was once a part of him,  
And was a mystery that still humbled him  
In his best memories. He was glad for them,  
There in that silence, where he would not ask  
How far he might be from deserving them.  
He had not come to ask; he had come to tell her  
What she must hear him say, and how his dream  
Of long ago had latterly become  
Another dream of now. The first had been  
Of a long warfare in a field of death,  
And of a noiseless victory; the second  
Was one of those compelled necessities  
Of righteousness for which the man appointed  
Has God's mark on him and his work to do.  
If Malory's God was not the King of Glory,  
It was no less a king, whose voice foretold  
Obedience where it fell; and it had fallen  
Where manifestly it must be obeyed.  
It was as plain as that to Malory,  
And would be so to her, for whose repose

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Obedience was exacted. Never in death,  
More than in life, could there be such a sleep  
As one that must not suffer some unrest  
While one man was alive. If Nightingale  
Were dead, and Malory dead, as Agatha was,  
There would be peace. It was as plain as that  
To Malory, moving there among the graves.

Now he could see time burning through the trees  
With a slow crimson light that was, he reasoned,  
The last of his last day that would be dying  
Down to its end. Well, he was ready for that;  
And it was better than a sunless day  
Of clouds or rain would be. He could see now  
A carved white name; and he began to see  
More than a name, more than a shadowy face,  
More than he came to find. For a flash of time  
That was not measured she was there before him,  
Between him and her house that had no door.  
No shreds or clings of a mortal change  
Defiled or shadowed her serenity.  
Her changing face and her mouse-colored hair,  
Her solemn eyes that always laughed because  
They saw so much that he was never to see—  
Her mouth, and her white cheeks that were not white,  
Her hands and feet, and all the rest of her,  
Were there, and they were gone. But she was there,  
And she was listening. So he told her all

## *Part Second*

He knew—which was abysmally not all  
There was to know. How far he must go back,  
And by what unimaginable guidance,  
To find himself in all his origins  
Was more than science knew—which was as well,  
Also, as other knowledge not for man.  
He had not come to ask of Agatha  
More than he knew.

“For one who has once had it,”

He told her, as an answer to her silence,  
“Losing his faith in God is a disaster  
By doubt still clouded and by nature made  
Supportable. But to lose faith in man  
And in himself, and all that’s left to die for,  
Is to feel a knife in his back before he knows  
What’s there, and then to know it was slimed first  
With fiery poison to consume the friend  
Who had no friend. It would have been as easy  
To make me die instead of you, or with you,  
But that would never have been enough for him.  
He was not so enamoured of soft ways  
As to do that. If someone else’s neck  
Was a good base whereon to set his feet  
For a new spring to new vindictiveness,  
There was no logic in his not using it.  
Why else was a neck there? I warned him once,  
That he might in some jungle of affairs

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Tread inadvertently, and in the dark,  
On a bad serpent, and it seems he did so;  
Although his victim, then too much of a cripple  
To sting him dead, has waited a long time.  
Too long, as I can almost hear you saying,  
Here in this dying light. I must leave all  
To silence, and to justice after time—  
Another justice that shall have its eyes,  
As ours by time's necessity has not;  
Which also may be well."

Her name had now  
A dimness in a light that faded slowly  
Into a twilight that would not last long;  
And in the west he could see no more crimson  
Through darker trees that suddenly were changed,  
And stiller than they were. They were too still  
To stay with, or to go from. With her name  
For a companion, they were like all there was  
Of home for him, who had no home on earth,  
Or need of one. The time of his desire,  
And of one other man's iniquity  
Had yet one day's diminished length to fill  
Before it was complete, and that was all.  
Or was it all? Her name, assuring him,  
Would answer nothing, and he would not ask.  
He was not there to ask.

## Part Second

“Now you have heard,”

He told her silently; “and having seen you,  
I can see only one thing left to do.  
I saw you for that moment, Agatha,  
Which was enough, because it was no more.”

He felt her glimmering name on the cold stone  
With chilly fingers. There was only a name  
There now; and he would leave it. On his way  
From there, from Agatha, he was held a little  
By two unhappy words that he could read  
Where no trees blotted them: *Absalom Spinner*.  
He scowled, and muttered; and for no new cause,  
Felt to make sure of having in his pocket  
His only wealth worth treasuring. He paused,  
And in the dim light staring at that name,  
Murmured, “It may not have been Nightingale,  
So much as a too warm and willing bait.  
There was a dereliction more primeval  
Than his would be, and no affair of mine.  
Spinner goes home to silence, as he went  
Too many a time while she was fooling him,  
And there may find some quiet. We don’t know.  
There is no quiet in life, and may be none  
Till we may know that living is not dying.  
There are two of us who may know more or nothing  
Tomorrow. There is no room for us here.  
There are two of us who are no longer wanted

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Here at this cannibal banquet of man's life.  
The word was given, and was not recalled;  
And Agatha smiled."

He walked on, wondering  
Why he was saying that, over and over:  
"And Agatha smiled."

So on, and into Sharon,  
He walked alone with night that had no eyes  
To recognize him. He passed only strangers,  
Nor many of them, though fifty thousand of them  
Were not far off; and fifty thousand of them,  
Or most of them, were only as many names,  
Unknown to him. They might as well be names  
On headstones, quiet as those he had left  
Behind him in the dark, for all they were  
To him; though he thought how each particular  
Few feet and inches of unquiet life  
That was a man or woman was for one  
Or other, respectively, a more germane  
And urgent work of God than was revealed  
In others irremediably unlike it.  
Annoyed that any such fond inanity  
As that should be appointed to pursue him  
And flick him like a moth along his last  
Dark way through Sharon, he moved on unseen,  
Or seen as nothing more felonious

## *Part Second*

Than a man going somewhere by himself  
On a calm starry evening, harmlessly.

Now in a street with trees on either side  
That hid the stars, he paused, seeing not far  
Ahead of him a house with lighted windows,  
Telling of life within—but of what life,  
Or whose, or of what scope or quality,  
Revealing only what a curtain drawn  
May show; for there were shadows passing on it,  
As of some phantasmagorial invasion  
Of a place that once was his, and Agatha's;  
He had come from far away to look at it  
Once more, and there it was, and was not his.  
He would not make a feast of seeing it.  
He did not even so much as know whose house  
He looked at; and his memory was not asking  
What drama of home was played by shadows now  
Behind those curtains. He was not there to ask.  
He was there to see a house for the last time;  
And having seen it, he had seen all there was  
For him to see in Sharon. When he left it,  
There was one way more to go; and that way taken,  
There was a mansion somewhere by the sea.

### III

WITH his last piece of silver disappearing  
To pay for his last food in a retreat  
That harbored other derelicts in Sharon,  
Malory saw the glimmering end of time  
Going out, even while he saw new daylight coming  
Indifferently through dawn-defying windows,  
Unwashed and unashamed. It was a place  
Accommodated more to his departure  
Than to his entertainment or repose,  
And one from which he went out willingly,  
And gratefully, into the sunless light  
Of a new morning that was not yet day,  
And was not time. There was no longer need  
Of time for him, more than there was of rest.  
There was a way that he had come from Sharon,  
And there was one from Sharon to the sea;  
And there was nothing else on earth for him  
Until he found the sea, and a new house  
With towers and trees. That would be Nightingale's  
New house; and Nightingale, he was informed,  
Was in it, like a large and powerful worm  
In a stone shell—a more pernicious mollusc,  
With his hard house on land, than anything sunk  
By God's foresight and love to live in the sea,  
A stationary monster, doing no harm  
And doing no good. Nightingale should have been  
Like that—as God intended him to be,

### *Part Third*

And then forgot. So Malory must be fate,  
Or more than fate, doing God's work, or fate's,  
Or whatsoever the best name of it  
Might be; for he was not pursuing words  
This morning as he walked out finally  
From Sharon towards the sunrise and the last  
Of a long journey that would have an end  
Where Nightingale was waiting in that house  
Which he had always wanted, by the sea.

Like a fire to burn the world, with all its anguish,  
And with all its evil evidence of man,  
Malory saw the sun and saw it rising  
For the last time, he said; and that was well.  
In a world that would not burn there was no reason  
Why a flash, and an immediate way out,  
Should be delayed for two that were too many  
To be alive and would be valued more  
For being dead. He felt the gratefulness  
Of nature for so right a thought as that,  
And the approval of the rising sun;  
He felt the spur of a good going forward  
To the right end—a prize of realization  
Withheld from all but the more fortunate  
Whose dreams are preparations. Malory walked  
In common shoes as Hermes might have walked  
In wingèd sandals when he was not flying;  
And every step that was away from Sharon

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Was nearer to the sea.

He tramped along,  
Securely, with an onward earnestness,  
And with a purpose in his expedition,  
That might not from the curious be concealed.  
He was not one of the world-nourishing  
Unnoticeables who fit the place that finds them  
And are not feverish to find another;  
Nor was he one with any claim or station  
Among the vagabonds, who would have marked him  
As a man scratched, a gentleman gone down,  
And going still. He would be one of those  
Who in their unrevealed appearances  
Are more distinguished than they are distinct,  
And therefore are not welcome in the fold  
Of the old brotherhood. It was not so  
When Malory was himself, and now it mattered  
Little, if anything, what a brother man  
Might think of him. If there should be no thought,  
So much the better. Malory would attend  
To as much thinking of his own enigma  
As was imperative or expedient;  
And a man saying that was not at odds  
With his obscurity.

An hour or so  
Away from Sharon, none of the few faces

### *Part Third*

That were abroad so early would be one  
To recognize, or to be reckoned with  
In terms of amiable embarrassment  
Begotten of mischance; and it was good  
When he could say that such an hour or so  
Was dead, and well behind him. It was early,  
And he was free—with all the wealth there was.  
For him, in one small weapon that was his.  
Croesus had nothing now but a rich name  
That left him poor. Malory was like God.  
So far as there was life to be considered,  
He was omnipotent; and as for dying,  
Death was another country where new light  
Or darkness would inevitably prevail.  
If there was hazard in his tearing down  
This treacherous and imperfect house of man,  
There was a moment of magnificence,  
No less, in which the worst part of the world  
Would make a piece of history best forgotten,  
Along with his, that soon would follow it  
Where history goes. It was as plain as that  
To Malory, and so early in the morning  
That hours to come were only coming names  
Of time, the grave of names. This afternoon,  
So far ahead of him, was only a name,  
Because it was not yet; and what it held  
For Malory was a picture that he saw  
Because it should be there. The best and worst

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Of pictures that we draw before we see them  
Are there like that.

With none to challenge him,  
And only few to stare a moment at him  
As at a stranger too much on his way  
To pay for salutation, he walked on  
With more than half of Sharon still asleep  
Behind him. There was only one more distance  
Between him and the end. The rest were done,  
And were among the journeys men have taken  
So long ago that we shall see no roads  
To say where those men went. As hours became  
Forgotten but implacable recruits  
Of his pursuing past, the name of Sharon  
Was that of a dead city far behind him;  
And as he walked the end was always with him,  
And he was always nearer to the sea—  
Till now it was full noon. He would soon have  
The shadow of himself for company,  
Not asking or imagining for how long  
Some other shadows had attended him,  
Or what they were. All he had seen of late,  
All he saw now, was real—of a true form  
And of a substance undeniable;  
Or all but Agatha, and she was real.  
There were no shadows or illusions waiting  
In Nightingale's unnecessary mansion

### *Part Third*

To make him pause; for there was Nightingale,  
Who was no shadow, and was deplorably  
No phantom or illusion. He was as real  
As reptiles, or as wolves are in dark places  
Where men go perilously and unsuspecting  
Of what else may be there till they are torn  
By claws they cannot see. There were no doubts  
Or reservations to be spent and wasted  
On what he sought and was to find before  
The sun went down. It was not going yet,  
And Malory knew the sea was not far off.  
There would be more light left than he should need;  
And when it was all done, there would be light  
For those who came to see.

A giant elm,  
Whose height from somewhere out of memory  
Came back as yesterday an oak had come,  
Told him how far away the desert wreck  
Of a storm-buried past was from him now;  
And a blank vision of oblivion  
Chilled him with an irrelevance of regret  
That he should never see that elm again—  
As if a landmark had a language older  
Than his, and a long eloquence that only  
Ruin could understand. He saw behind him  
Its height and silence; and as he moved on,  
He could see all there ever was of Sharon

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Fading into a distance that was death;  
For there was no more time now than an hour  
Between him and the sea; and afternoon,  
Which earlier was a name for time unborn,  
Was here, and it would soon be growing old.  
Malory saw before him, drawn already  
By fate, a place he need not hurry to see,  
So long as it was there and was the place  
Where he was going. Nightingale was there;  
And any place where there was Nightingale,  
Today, was a good place for Malory.

There was no need of asking whose it was  
When Malory found it. Like a magician's work,  
Or the small castle of a little king,  
He saw it among trees, and saw the towers  
Of which he had been told. He was not held  
By them, or long impressed. He had not come  
To study them; he had come to see the man  
Who was inside, or in the neighborhood—  
If such as he had neighbors. The whole place  
Told of an empty wealth of loneliness  
More than of hospitality and friends.  
There might be satellites who deceived themselves  
As friends, but they would never deceive the man  
Within, who may have opened his heavy doors,  
For conscience' sake, to anyone who might flatter  
His host with an adroitness to be borne,

### *Part Third*

And help him to forget. He would soon forget,  
Said Malory; and he waited for a door  
To open, thinking of two other doors  
That soon would open to an older house,  
Where all men go.

Waiting inside, he saw  
More wealth, attesting an intelligence  
That was another lonely waste. He felt it  
In all there was about him; and for surety  
Of his possession and determination,  
He touched, with fingers that were not afraid  
To find it there, a more sufficient wealth  
In his own pocket. He was a richer man  
Than Nightingale. He was the richest man  
In this poor world. He was a king, whose word  
Was life or death, until another door  
Was opened and the voice of a lost friend—  
The voice of a dead friend, he must remember—  
Called him as if a boy that he had known  
And loved at school were calling him in pain,  
For which there was no cure. Across more years  
Than men had lived he heard it calling him,  
With all but the authority of youth  
To make it young. There was a humor in it  
That had the sound of knowledge mocking hope,  
And wonder sharing certainty with doubt;  
And there was more in it than had a name

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

For vengeance to invent. And when it said,  
“Malory, are you there!” it had the sound  
It might have had if in the mills of years  
Another life than Malory’s had been broken.

#### IV

LIKE a desolating cry of an old music,  
Long unheard, and falling strange in a new place,  
Came again the searching voice of one appointed  
To be voiceless; and an ache in Malory's heart  
Was a poison that would soon be half a sorrow  
If he waited; and he waited. He must act,  
Or a folly more to be disowned and loathed  
Than fear would slowly strangle resolution  
With hands invisible and with silky fingers  
Stronger than fate. And where was fate, meanwhile,  
To leave him unresolved and hesitating  
Till he was hearing "Malory, are you there,"  
For a third time, and hearing it unanswered,  
As if there were no answer? He was there,  
At last, and opportunity was with him,  
And he had yet no answer but his presence,  
Which a few steps towards an open door  
Revealed. With his hand clutching hidden death,  
He stood and saw the man whom he had come  
So far to kill, and waited, saying nothing,  
As he gazed there at one who had grown older  
Than time had made him.

In a velvet robe,  
And in a prisoner's chair that was on wheels,  
Nightingale was half sitting and half lying,  
So nearly a pale prey of death already

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

That Malory's hand, still hidden in his coat,  
Held nothing but his hate. The face he saw  
Staring at his and waiting for some word,  
Was that of one whom he had honored once  
With love and trust, and with a grateful envy  
That would have yielded all but life itself  
To pay for such a friend. The same dark eyes  
Were burning at him with a lower fire  
From a white face that he had never seen  
Before. The face that he had loved and hated  
Was not the face he saw. The bones were there  
That formerly were buried under power  
And grace, and there was as much more of it  
As time and pain together had not shrunk  
To skin and death. In youth's idolatry  
There was no possibility of this;  
And in the fires of wreck and revelation,  
Nothing had been foreseen that was like this—  
Which was unfair. It was not even fair fate,  
Said Malory; and he waited for an answer  
To his appearance. He had not come to ask,  
He had come to act; and as he was not acting,  
He waited. There was nothing for him to say  
That moved his tongue, and he had best be going,  
If the rich gold of expectation yielded  
Only a dross like this. He looked away  
From the wan wreck before him to three walls  
Tiered high with books that held the best of man's

## *Part Fourth*

Creation and reflection for the solace  
Of this thing in a chair that went on wheels,  
And to a fourth wall that was most a window,  
Framing a sea and sky for Nightingale  
To watch and contemplate, and to see pictured  
With shipwreck and remorse. He had always wanted  
A place like this; and having a large habit  
Of seeing as his what most it was he wanted,  
Now he could have the sky and the wide ocean  
Together, and in a chair that went on wheels,  
He could sit still and see them all day long.  
There was no need of killing him; he was dead  
Before his name was called.

“Well, Malory,”  
Said Nightingale, with questions in his eyes  
And in his voice, “the old mariner’s ashore;  
Look at him, and you’ll see him at the end  
Of his last cruise. You may as well have a chair  
And see him comfortably. If you have come  
To shoot him, he will not be disagreeable,  
Or argumentative. If I surprise you  
With a mistaken levity, and a notion  
That’s all outside your proper meditation,  
Forgive me. But experience, I have found,  
Encourages an imaginative caution;  
Though caution, I may guess, would serve me now  
As a thin armor. I might ring a bell,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

But who should answer it in time to save you  
From a superfluous incarceration,  
And me from a good sleep? I don't sleep well,  
Malory; and if truth has painted you  
As you look now, you are not of the seven.  
I wonder what you have there in your pocket,  
More than a hand. Again I'll ask your pardon  
If my imagination is in error;  
And then, if you may care, I'll tell you why  
It was that you brought visions in with you,  
And some that were not lovely."

Malory sighed,

As one discomfited by destiny  
Too shrewd for chance, and said to Nightingale,  
"I see no reason left why you should live,  
Or why I should stay longer. You had always  
Too much of an unused intelligence  
To be as you are now; and you have still  
Enough to need the word of no physician  
To say where you are going. If there's hell,  
Of one sort or another, and there may be,  
You will not be much older than you are  
Before you know. Or, it is possible  
That yours was here."

"I see," said Nightingale.

"A doctor, to be more than wind and hope,

## *Part Fourth*

Must have three eyes. Well, you may have your fee  
For asking—or without.”

Malory moved  
Along indifferently, and at the window  
Stood looking at the ocean, which he saw  
As men had seen it who were not yet men.  
In ages lost in the long void of time,  
It must have tossed and foamed as helplessly  
As now, at the wind's will; and to the eyes  
Of Malory's unimagined ancestors  
It must have been a fearsome mystery,  
Filled with infernal things in ancient fancy,  
As it was now in fact. Look as he would,  
Life was a fabrication of the demons,  
On land, or in the sea, or in the air.  
A snake, seeing a man, could frighten him  
And sting him to quick death; and a small fly  
Could sting him to slow death, and with no aid  
Of dream or fancy. A far smaller thing  
Than a small fly had shattered Nightingale;  
And he was dying in his grand new house,  
Which he had always wanted, near the ocean.  
A tired bacteriologist, seeing him there,  
Might say there was a God. Nature, at least,  
Had never done her work so well before,  
Or saved a man of science so much trouble.  
A sense of rest, and of an unforeseen

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Release replenished him with a new wish  
To live—a wish that had in it more wonder  
Than satisfaction. A new fear of living  
Had come to him who had no fear of dying,  
Or wish to die, or means to live. He wondered  
How such a warfare of inept negations  
Might end—when for a moment, having turned  
Himself to look at Nightingale again,  
He fancied he was in the way of knowing  
Immediately of that; for the first sight  
That held him was no invalid in a chair,  
But a black weapon pointing silently  
Straight at him. He considered the short barrel,  
And then the square pale face of Nightingale,  
Grinning mysteriously and ominously,  
More like a living mask on a dead face  
Than like a face alive. But Nightingale  
Was living, and for the nonce, apparently,  
Was finding life a privilege and a pleasure.

“Forgive me, Malory, if I’m curious,”  
He said, “but I’ve a leprosy to know  
What you have in that pocket where your hand is.  
This thing of mine—it was not always mine—  
Is educated and almost alive,  
And might have speech. Now let me look at yours,  
And I will tell you then which implement  
I like the better of the deadly two.

### *Part Fourth*

I may want both of them, if yours is pretty—  
Like Absalom's. Are you surprised, somewhat?  
Let me have yours, and I'll say how it was,  
And why, and all about it. You are not going  
To kill me in this chair and have a mess.  
I can see that."

"I came down here for that,"

Malory answered, "and I came too late.  
Nature has beaten me. Nature, or God;  
I don't know which. I have no need of this."

"I thank you, Malory." Nightingale, still grinning,  
Had a flat pistol now in each thin hand,  
And held them aimed at Malory. "Now sit down.  
With your permission I'll say these are mine,  
Although I do not use them. They are pretty,  
And I have always loved the beautiful;  
And the most beautiful of all there was  
On earth you stole from me. But we'll go back  
To that. Now this one in my other hand  
Was given to me, and gladly, by a friend  
Who came one day, as you have come this day,  
To make an end of me. Yes—Absalom.  
He had magnified himself with wicked gin,  
And I was not like this. I was on my feet.  
I smiled at him, and I said, 'Absalom,  
You cannot kill me without having a drink

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

With me in my new house.' He hesitated,  
And I held out my hand. He wanted rum  
More than he wanted me, and did not know it  
Until he was informed—though I'll not boast  
Of any too brisk a sureness at the time,  
Or say that I was happy to be waiting  
So much at his not all assuring service.  
I was not comfortable while I waited,  
But I was calm. 'Absalom,' I suggested,  
'There's a whole world of things for me to tell you,  
But first we'll have a drink in my new house—  
A tall, strong, curative drink made long ago,  
An endless and illuminating drink,  
Before I make of you a shining man,  
A free man, and a merrier citizen  
Than you have seen yet in your looking-glass.'"

"Yes," Malory said, "you could afford, perhaps,  
As much as that, or more. I have not been  
So far from news of life that not a word  
Of you has found me. I have known more of you  
Than a man has to know to be advised  
Of honor wasted, as mine was on yours,  
That I called honor. I leave men's affairs  
That are not mine to men whose part it is  
To manage them with a safe decency.  
But when a friend . . . Why am I saying this?  
Why am I here, with all I came to do

### *Part Fourth*

So nearly done before me. Absalom's wife—  
Where is she now? I know where Absalom is,  
For I have seen his grave."

"If you saw that,"

Said Nightingale, amiably, "you saw the stone  
That I placed over him. Ophelia's father  
Had a good end, or she believed he had,  
And so had Absalom. As for his wife,  
A moment of indulgence and attention  
Will heal your implications in one error  
That cries for healing. She was not a wife;  
She was a fruity sort of Cyprian fungus,  
With arms and legs, the brain-pan of a chicken,  
And all the morals of a pleasant monkey.  
God in his wisdom, which is infinite,  
And is not ours, has always made such things  
To be consumed. They are for nothing else,  
And are good for nothing else; and if they could,  
They would be nothing else. Send them to school,  
And see what they learn there. Give them a home,  
And see what's left of it when they have had it  
Long enough to be tired of living in it.  
They are not happy, or not so for long,  
And that's a pity—or may be a warning  
For all the others, who are interested  
But not at large. When you ask where she is,  
You may as well be asking for the story

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Of all the rest of them. She's not in Sharon;  
And Sharon has not seen her since a time  
When Absalom, failing to assassinate her,  
And losing half his face, did me the honor  
Aforesaid. So for God's sake, Malory,  
Whatever you do to me, or to my name,  
Let Absalom Spinner's name be one to shine  
As that of one man who had what he wanted.  
Absalom came to make a feast of me,  
And went away, or rather was carried away,  
To sleep without a memory or a care,  
Until he woke to find a longer feast  
Awaiting him than I should ever have made.  
I fixed a competent annuity  
On Absalom, who made one splendid leap  
From Sharon into paradise, and remained.  
He was illuminated for three years  
With light that never revealed him to himself  
As a poor wick that he must saturate  
Unceasingly in order not to see it.  
He was a panorama and a pageant  
That would have been an eminence in a city  
Greater than Sharon. He was joy and color  
Where nothing has been like him since he went.  
As long as he could play, Spinner was trumps—  
And always won. His only currency  
Worth counting in his triumph was a freedom  
To be a fool; and he had more of it

## *Part Fourth*

Than he could lose. Spinner had everything,  
And had it for three years in tropic bloom.  
Before it might have faded, or become  
Only an occupation, or a duty,  
Absalom died. He fell down under a dray,  
And died. With his beginnings and ideals,  
And the Lord watching him, giving him first  
Some brief and beneficial misery  
For joy to come, his cup was alabaster,  
And it was always full until it cracked,  
And the glad juice ran out. No, Malory,  
Never defeat your sympathies or regrets  
With Absalom. Lay roses on his grave,  
But do not desecrate them with your tears;  
For Absalom, wherever he is, may see you.  
You may go round the world, and round again,  
And after that you may go round once more  
For sight of as inexhaustible a cask  
Of happiness as Absalom, and not find it."

Malory sighed, and was almost asleep  
With weariness. He had not known how tired  
A weight that has at last been lifted leaves him  
Who carries it too far. But he could say  
To Nightingale, half hearing his own words,  
"You are the last of men, as I know men,  
To make so easy a simplicity  
Of lives that are not yours. If your condition

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Is a best evidence of your playful ethics,  
You are less fortunate than Absalom—  
Who, in his way, was as unusual  
As you are, Nightingale. I have seen life,  
And have not seen it easy. I have seen death.  
Yes, Nightingale; I have seen death, also."

"Yes, Malory," said Nightingale, distinctly,  
And with a resignation of assent,  
"You have seen death. You are looking at it now,  
And to your inexpressible satisfaction.  
I know it; and I've had cataracts of ideas  
Descending on me, and to some effect,  
Since you came in. There's been a trickle of them  
Before; and we'll say more of them tomorrow."

"I don't know. I am going," Malory said,  
And rose, only to find that his knees bent  
Like hinges in the legs of a lay-figure.  
He sat, or fell, into his chair again,  
And there forgot to say where he was going.  
He did not know. He was too tired to care.

## V

**I**N the morning, in the light of a sun shining  
 On a million little waves that flashed and danced  
 With a cold primordial mockery there below him  
 And beyond him, beyond sight or thought of him,  
 Or of Nightingale, whose hospitality  
 Was like a venomous food that a blind man  
 Had eaten in his weariness, Malory looked  
 Away into the distance and found only  
 Distance. He was an outcast long at home  
 With distances, but never with one like this  
 That was before him now. He was alive,  
 And was to have been dead with Nightingale,  
 Who sat with death already; he was awake,  
 And he could see too clearly and too far,  
 Or so he thought, over an empty ocean  
 Into an empty day, and into days  
 That were to come and must be filled somehow  
 With other stuff than time. There would be friends  
 In Sharon to acknowledge him so far  
 As on his word to see him on his way  
 To somewhere else. There was no fiery need  
 Of being a fool, and he must let the past  
 Serve as it would the present and the future;  
 Which was a way of saying that he must have  
 A few reviving dollars. He had eaten  
 Nightingale's food only to give him strength  
 To go without it, and would have no more.

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

"There's one thing in this Christian life of ours,  
Which none of us could live, engages me,"  
Nightingale said to Malory, coming down  
To say some formal words and then to go.  
"I mean the other cheek—in moderation.  
You are a doctor, and that's why you know  
What happens to a man who walks all day,  
And does n't eat till he's too tired to care  
If anyone eats. I sent it up to you  
Before you should see me. You called it tact,  
Perhaps, but fear was nearer the right name.  
I was afraid that you might emigrate  
In anger when you found yourself awake  
In one of my not execrable beds.  
No matter what I've been, what's left of me  
Is human; and if you have Christian faith,  
Or Christian curiosity, sufficient  
Unto some other evil day than this,  
You may lay treasures up—if not in heaven,  
Then here on earth, which is another matter—  
Treasures not for yourself. I'm no such ass  
As innocence like that would make of me,  
Though I've been worse. I want you in this house  
Until tomorrow. You are in no haste now—  
Now you have seen that I am not worth killing,  
And you will do yourself and me a service  
If you will not run off immediately.

## *Part Fifth*

For, Malory,"—his mouth trembled—"there's not going  
To be much time."

"There will be time enough,"

Malory said, "to make you call to Christ

For less. I can do nothing about that.

I can say nothing that will give you hope,

Or happiness. I am sorry that you must live,

And think, until you die; and you have there

The sum of all the grief there is in me

For rather less than a fair reckoning.

Why, in God's name, should you be asking me

To stay, and watch? Am I so medieval

As to enjoy seeing even my worst friend

Suffer too long? I'd be no better for that."

Nightingale tapped the wheels that held his chair,

And looked across the waves. Then, with a smile

Of understanding that had no reproach,

He turned again to look at Malory:

"You have a right to say it with an edge,

And I have none to mind your saying it.

Some follow lights that they have never seen,

And I was given a light that I could see

But could not follow. There's the devil in that,

Always; and that's why I am asking you

To stay until tomorrow. If the food

That you have eaten here distresses you,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Pay for it, and forget it. It was yours.  
I have a sum of money that is yours,  
And I can see no honor-gnawing harm  
In your belated repossession of it;  
For you were robbed of it as viciously  
As if you had been gagged and strangled for it.  
But that's a tune that I was to play later,  
If you would stay and listen. I saw your eyes  
When you came yesterday to finish me,  
And knew that you would stay. I don't know why  
A man's condition makes a difference,  
But so it is. Somehow it is not done,  
Or not by Malory. For a glance at me  
Told him how more proficient an assassin  
Fate was than any doctor. You will stay,  
If only for a suffering abstraction  
Misnamed humanity. I don't mean myself,  
And you are in no haste."

"I'm in no haste,"  
Said Malory, "and I don't know what you mean—  
Or all you mean. I know that I was robbed,  
And share my knowledge willingly with you.  
That was a part of it, but far from all.  
You spoke of it, and may do as much more  
As your interpretation of affairs  
Compels or counsels. I had not come for that,  
Or painted my bare walls with expectations."

## *Part Fifth*

"I see," said Nightingale. "You saw so far  
Beyond a small recovery of the past  
That all was in the present. Naturally  
You had not come for that. I never fancied  
That you were here for that. For when you came,  
I saw you as you looked when we were boys  
Together at school; and in a flash I saw  
What you had learned of me in other schools.  
I'm sorry, Malory, that the world goes round  
The sun in such a way as to leave time  
So far behind it; or I should be sorry,  
If I saw less. I see more, possibly,  
Than you see, Malory. If you had shot me,  
You would have seen a finite retribution  
That would have done no good. It's not like that.  
You might as well have shot the flying earth  
To kill a system—of which you are part,  
And so the whole. But that's not Agatha."

His calm eyes for a moment were like those  
Of an expectant and confessed offender.  
But there was nothing done, and nothing said,  
Till Malory spoke: "I will hear anything  
That you may say to me of Agatha,  
And your destruction of her. You destroyed her  
With hell's deliberation in your method,  
Or I'm as wrong as hell. You cannot say

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

That I am wrong. You may have been the devil,  
But you were never a fool."

"I beg of you,  
Malory, to believe me when I swear  
That I was more than one. I was a college  
Of fools, under one scalp and in one skin.  
But I was not myself. That's an old plaster,  
And one that has been used till it will stick  
No longer. You are right, for you were saying  
Just about that." Nightingale closed his eyes,  
As if a picture of his thoughts had hurt him.  
Malory watched the sea.

For a long time  
There was a stillness as of all things said,  
And of a waiting for no other end  
Than evident farewell. But Nightingale  
Said quietly, at last, "No, Malory,  
There were no diagrams of your disaster  
Drawn to include what came, or half of it.  
Yet, when it came . . ."

"Yes, Nightingale—when it came.  
You were not there in Sharon when it came.  
You were not there again till we were gone—  
All three of us. They are not made of iron,  
Women like her; though many of them are stronger

## *Part Fifth*

In stronger ways than ours. She and her child  
Should not have gone so early, Nightingale.  
If it was best for them to go together,  
It was not then. They would be here today  
If you had been—yourself. I can say that,  
As well as you, for I was not myself,  
And am not yet. There was a devil waiting  
To steal me from myself. You are no part  
Of that, although you may have been a devil.  
I think you must have been one, Nightingale,  
For you were not a man in a man's way.  
It was some time before we found that out,  
And you had not come back. If you had come . . .  
I am glad not to know. If you had come,  
We might not be here as we are today —  
Which might be better. It could not well be worse  
For you, or more ridiculous for me.  
It is almost a pity that you're not able  
To savor properly the humor of this."

"God's right is yours," Nightingale answered, slowly,  
And with no frown of protest, "to be bitter.  
Yet, Malory, we'll see what there is left.  
There may be more than you are willing to see,  
If seen too near. I doubt if any of this  
Is new, for I dare say it has all happened  
In Samarcand or Celebes before us.  
Should even a smouldering of apology

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Be living in that, extinguish it at once  
With indignation, hatred, or contempt.  
You cannot hate me any harder now  
Than heretofore, though you might find an anger  
Somewhere in you that has not yet been used.  
But I'll hope not; and I shall say but little  
Of Agatha, and that only by your leave.  
I said that when I saw you standing there,  
When you came yesterday, I saw you first  
As I had seen you long ago at school,  
When we were boys together, never dreaming  
Of what the coming men in us had waiting.  
There was nothing then of mine that was not yours;  
And you, if I had asked it, would have given  
More than you had to give. You would have found  
Outside your own possession what you lacked,  
If possible, and you would have called it mine.  
I should have done no less, and should have said  
That a friend who so failed me was a liar—  
A thing without a day's worth of remembrance  
Left in him for my eyes. In those unfledged  
Omniscient years of youth, I knew myself  
Better, sometimes, than was a joy for me;  
For there were premonitions then, and warnings.  
I saw myself a part of a small world  
Of traps and lies and fights and compromises,  
And saw beyond it while I saw it coming,  
And welcomed it—although I measured it

## *Part Fifth*

For what it was; and hating it, even then,  
Precociously, I have not always loved  
Myself. I had enough of other vision  
To see the other side of selfishness,  
But I had not the will to sacrifice  
My vanity for my wits. I was the law—  
And here I am. Here I am not the law.  
I saw you, Malory, in those same raw years,  
As far from me, in dreams and differences,  
As ever you got; and that was a long way.  
You were a thin-skinned prodigy of science  
Before you had a whisker. You were never  
A doctor; you had not the hide for it,  
And you had no authoritative aura  
To make a poor sick citizen glad for you  
And God in the same room. You learned as much  
Before you were too old; and I believe  
My foresight and affection aided you  
In your inquisitive enmity to microbes.”

“You led me to a door that had no key  
For me to use until you gave me one,”  
Malory said; “and you made possible  
A place where I might never have arrived  
Without your foresight and your confidence.  
Good God—your confidence!” Malory poured  
A powerful drink of whiskey for himself,  
And drank it with a purpose.

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

“You have lifted

Rather too much of that abused nepenthe,  
Since you became a question-mark in Sharon,”  
Said Nightingale, with his eye on the bottle;  
“But it will do your body and soul no manner  
Of harm today. You may not care tomorrow  
Whether or no the ocean’s made of it.  
We’ll see—or you will. So you found at last  
Your niche of honor in the living temple,  
Which is a place worth finding. I found one,  
Also, in which I stood more gloriously  
Mistaken for a beneficial hero  
Than anyone else in town. I did some good,  
And brought a sound and honorable name  
Out of the dust and cobwebs of decay.  
My father, a most melodious Nightingale,  
Sang more songs than were good for a good bird,  
And I was the indemnifying phoenix.  
I was a youth of parts and promises,  
Endowed with a convenient fluid conscience  
That covered the best of me with a bright varnish,  
And made me shine. If none had thwarted me,  
I might be shining still, instead of dying  
In this expensive nest. If I had learned,  
In time, to know that I was not the law  
That made me live, I should have done more shining,  
And in a light more grateful to my eyes.  
I was a sort of Saint George in the town,

## *Part Fifth*

However, as years went on; and I slew dragons  
Habitually, having a spear of gold  
Which I had fashioned of my own endeavor  
And sharpened with commendable incentive.  
That was all right, and it was all as easy  
As it was right. I made a better town  
Of Sharon, and I never sang outside  
Myself the song in me that I knew best.  
Why should I sing it? No one asked for it,  
And only the envious and inefficient  
Would have enjoyed it. I was not so bad,  
So long as I was having my own way.  
It's a grave matter for the commonwealth,  
Sometimes, when a good egoist goes down,  
Whether he goes invisibly, as I did,  
Or with the flags and tatters of defeat  
Thrown after him. But that was all to be,  
And I was waiting, eminent and unwarned,  
Serene in Sharon. I was the dominant bird,  
Outsinging and outshining and outflying  
Everything else. I was informed one day  
That in my doing what no one else would do,  
I was a cold magician and a seer;  
And that, for whistling, gold would follow me.  
It did—though not till I had followed first,  
While others whistled. It was easy then  
For me to be magnificent and agreeable,  
For I had still to learn how heavy a cake

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

A king may have to eat. Before I learned,  
I was a lord of a small firmament,  
Or almost that, with fifty thousand stars,  
Most of them having a face that beamed on me,  
We'll say, with more approval than reproof;  
And that was right. I had robbed no man then,  
And no man had robbed me. I was untried  
In my submissions and humilities.  
I was unquestioned of my qualities.  
I was a friend to many who would have had  
No eyes to see me had their place been mine.  
I was a more approachable Maecenas  
Than always had the license of his judgment.  
I knew that I had played with the same cards  
That were for all to use, and played them better.  
I was a prodigal father's thrifty son,  
With wisdom to be generous in my thrift.  
I was a man the more to be admired  
For tempering admiration with respect,  
Or with a gracious imitation of it.  
I was a man aware that each man carried  
Only the lamp the Lord had given to him.  
I raised myself no higher than others held me,  
And therefore was a brother who understood.  
I was a light that would be shining always,  
A light for generations to remember.  
I was a sort of permanent morning star.  
I was the Glory of the Nightingales.

## *Part Fifth*

The sinful, well-intentioned Nemesis  
Who said that first—it must have been a woman—  
Should have had spiders in her marmalade,  
And scorpions every morning in her stockings.  
I was the Glory of the Nightingales!  
Give me a drink, and don't say it will kill me.  
You know damned well it won't. Only too well  
You know it won't—and don't say you're a doctor.  
I told you about time, and the earth moving.  
Arthritis and Ataxia—two Alphas,  
And a malevolent long alphabet  
Between them and Omega."

Malory stared

At Nightingale, partly in admiration,  
Partly in helpless wonder and regret  
For such a fusion of mortalities  
To make one death. Where was the use of power:  
If a wrong element in the beginning  
Was to make this of it? Where was the use  
Of satisfaction, hatred, or revenge,  
If life avenged itself? If it did, always,  
There would be justice hidden somewhere in it;  
But if the weak and headstrong and untried  
Paid for the rest to let the play go on—  
If there was more fragility and defeat  
Hiding in one disordered competence  
Than in a thousand safe complacencies,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Having not much to hide or to reveal—  
Why was it better not to be a dog?  
A tired bacteriologist might ask  
As much of Nightingale—or of himself.  
He had not asked. He had not come to ask.  
He had been tried, and had as little to say  
Of one discrepancy as of another.  
He was no longer critical. He saw  
Too near the end—forgetting how many ends  
There are that are not death.

“No, Malory,”  
Said Nightingale, returning from a silence,  
“I’m not composing an apology.  
I was looking at the sea. Apology  
Would be a worse offence to you than any  
That you have suffered yet of my invention;  
And I have been inventive, even as Cain  
Was active. I’ve been drenched until I smelt  
With praise of it. Fathers have made a show  
Of my initiative for their dull sons  
To copy, and have clucked at my foresight  
In seizing what another could not see.  
It is not always criminal to be first,  
But there’s a poison and a danger waiting  
For him who will not hear, and will not listen,  
While choruses of inner voices tell him  
When to be second. That was the curse prepared

## *Part Fifth*

For me: I would not listen to my voices.  
I'll only say it was not wholly strange  
That I did not. When Agatha came to Sharon,  
I saw what all my prowlings had been worth,  
And what my restlessness had waited for.  
It was not hard for me to find my way  
To her acquaintance. I was not unknown,  
Or notably unaccepted or unsought;  
I was so far from that as to be shown  
To strangers as one having everything—  
Which was not so. The one thing I had not  
Was everything, and she was Agatha.  
But all was going well, and I believed  
My triumph, long so empty of what most  
It had so perilously lacked, would soon  
Be filled, and all my turmoil and unrest  
Be quieted. I should have everything—  
In truth as in report; and that was all  
I asked. The wonder of it, Malory,  
Is that I should have had it, or I think so,  
If in my self-destroying adoration  
Of my divinity, I had not brought you  
To see me at my worship, and see also  
The object of it. Kismet, or Ananke,  
Or melancholy chance, was following me  
When I brought you, as a friend brings a friend  
Into his treasure-house, to Agatha.  
You were my king of friends, and Agatha

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Was to be queen of all there was of me  
And mine to give her. There was no fool's dream  
In my delusion, for I was not a fool—  
Not then; and Agatha was not a dream—  
Not then. I was as near to paradise  
As man may be. It was you who shut the door.  
It was you who stood between me and the door.  
Yes, it was you who made a knave of me,  
When I was almost . . .”

“You were almost—what?”

Malory asked. “Are you the only knave  
Who has—almost—made a good woman love him?  
I fancy there are one or two before you  
In the lost archives of iniquity,  
For you are not unique in having a way.  
You might, with all your batteries of allegiance,  
Devotion, adoration, and insistence,  
Have stilled within her for a while her voices—  
Which were as many as yours—and I don't know  
That in some web of pity and hesitation  
She might not have been caught, to find herself  
Your—queen, it was, you called her. Nightingale,  
She would have been the most afflicted queen  
That ever reigned, if she had reigned with you.  
She never said to me as much as that;  
A few infrequent and unwilling words  
To which you might have listened, and agreed,

## *Part Fifth*

Told all her story. She was sorry for you,  
Nightingale, but she saw too many of you.  
All which would not have mattered, I suppose,  
If love had shared her caution, and told lies  
Enough to her about it, but your Kismet,  
Or your Ananke, had no power or skill  
To do love's work for you. Love was not there.  
You knew it was not there, but you would hear  
No voice, or none at first, but vanity's.  
Later, you may have heard God knows what voices;  
For all your nonsense of my shutting doors  
To your phantasmal paradise is worthy  
Of a mad weakling. I'll be generous now,  
When nothing comes of it, and call you mad—  
Though you are not. If I have called you weak,  
Say when it was, and ask your memory  
If you are still inventive. I know traits  
Of more malignities in mortal growth  
Than you have heard of, and I know their names;  
But not one of an ulcered understanding  
That you possessed once, or that possessed you,  
Of even the first of human rudiments.  
You are the one physician, Nightingale,  
For seizures, and peculiar paroxysms  
That are not yet established or observed  
In books or clinics. If you have healed yourself  
Too late, you have done something for your soul  
That even your stricken body will acknowledge,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

If only with more pain. Why should I stay  
To watch fate doing my work? I can do nothing."

"You might, by watching fate, do a deal more  
Than you came here to do," said Nightingale,  
With a long frown that held a weary smile:  
"Unless you have a mind to drown yourself  
In my commodious ocean, Malory,  
You will do well to stay. You must, indeed,  
For long enough to let me go on saying  
What I began. You interrupted me,  
And you were well within your injured rights.  
You see how pliable and how mild I am,  
And wonder, maybe, if it's all my conscience.  
I should not say it was. I should say, rather,  
It was acknowledgment and recognition,  
Humility and surrender. It's more than that,  
And has to do with more than you and me—  
But that will come. You bit my words away  
When I said I was almost . . . Well, I was.  
I was, till you took everything there was  
Alive for me to live for. You had science,  
And I had nothing without Agatha.  
It was the gash of that awakening  
That would not heal. Surprise and unbelief  
Tortured it, and slow hate infected it.  
A venom in me that I had not before  
Believed in—one that I had said and sworn

## *Part Fifth*

Was not there—made its way infernally  
Into the last and darkest crevices  
That were concealed in me to be explored  
And torn. I had not known there were such places  
Anywhere, till a devil discovered them  
With his contaminated little needle  
Of hate. He may have visited you later,  
Malory, and you may have come from Sharon  
Down here because he sent you. If he sent you,  
He was forestalled by power stronger than his,  
And vengeance more sublime. Strong as he is,  
The devil is only a part of destiny,  
Doing the worst he may. He deceives man,  
And makes an idiot shambles of the world  
About so often, and for the joy of seeing  
What fools men are; and whether he sees us here  
At war or peace, he flies and strikes and stings  
Incessantly, and has a name for peace  
That pleases him. Men would have said, and women,  
That I was, of all men, or should have been,  
The most at peace and the least agitated  
By the surprises of necessity.  
That was my way of showing myself to men,  
And women; and that was how I looked to you,  
And Agatha. You had taken everything  
Away from me, but that was how I looked.  
All that I almost had was gone before  
I knew who had it; and when at last I knew,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

I was alone with my incredulousness.  
I saw myself as one left robbed and stabbed  
By friends who had betrayed him in the dark.  
I wandered in the dark for many days  
And many nights before I found my way;  
And there was not a soul in Sharon knew  
What I was finding; and I did not know,  
At first, what I had found. I was to know,  
Thoroughly, only when as a physician,  
As you so unprofessionally suggested,  
I made a proper search and diagnosis  
Of what the devil within me had been doing.  
When devils have driven their stings in deep enough,  
And done their work, knowledge has time to mourn."

"But why the devil do you insist so hard  
On devilish help in your duplicity?"  
Malory asked, and scowled at Nightingale.  
"You knew your work, and what was coming of it,  
Or might come. I am leaving myself out,  
This time, and I'm not saying what came to me—  
Though I had devils enough assisting me  
To my destruction—if you must have devils."

"If I'm impervious to insinuation,"  
Nightingale said, "you called me a physician.  
And if I shall appear to you, perchance,  
More a physician than a penitent,

## *Part Fifth*

You will know why. If it would help the past,  
I'd get down somehow on my knees to you,  
And you would not like that; for it would make you  
Merely a little sick, and be a trial  
For me. I doubt if either of us would like  
Ourselves as well for such extravagance.  
I can afford, I fear, no more declension  
Of my interior esteem, or dwindling  
Of what there's left in me of dignity.  
I had some once, and many may have said  
I wore it with a comfort as becoming  
As it was native. I don't know just what  
They're saying now in Sharon. I'm not there.  
About the time you left was the right time  
For me to be away. When I returned  
To find you gone, and Agatha gone before you,  
I learned at last, as for the first time, wholly,  
And comprehensively, what I had done.  
There were no plans or diagrams, remember,  
In my invention. How should I be certain,  
I asked, of what might happen if I should knock  
Some props away that held some walls upright?  
There was no way of knowing. The house might stand  
For ever, or might slant and sway a little,  
And still survive, and stand. How should I know,  
For sure, what houses were ordained to stay  
Upright, no matter what storms broke over them,  
Or what was taken away from under them?

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Your legacy, which you needed, was for you  
A large one. It was a gift out of God's hand,  
Agatha said, and may have believed it was.  
I don't know that it was n't. My advice  
Told you to sink it all, and more than all,  
Where I was confident, and, as I saw it,  
Magnanimous. I sank as much as yours  
In the same hole, believing wealth would rise  
And flow like golden lava out of it—  
By far the worst inspired of my not many  
Mistakes in seeing too soon below the surface.  
Although I hated you as you did me—  
Later—I could do that for Agatha,  
And did it; and the gold flowed—for a while.  
I was across the ocean, trying wildly  
Not to wish both of you and your new home  
Were dead. You had taken everything from me,  
And I might have some peace if one of you,  
Or both of you, were gone. Call it the devil,  
Or not, but that's what was alive in me  
While I was over there where I was warned,  
Early, of what was coming. I sold all mine  
For someone else to lose, which is finance,  
And somehow failed—I'll hardly say forgot—  
To show you the same seasonable way  
Out of that golden hole. I must have known  
Down in me, and with all my talk of houses  
Falling or standing upright in all weather,

## *Part Fifth*

That I had thrown your world, and Agatha's,  
Cruelly out of its course, and so far out  
As never to return as the same world.  
My only word to you from over there  
Was an evasion and a temporizing,  
Telling you nothing, offering you nothing  
But a few shadowy promises. When you found  
The truth, it was too hard for Agatha,  
Who was not fit for shipwreck at that time;  
For, as you said, all women are not made  
Of iron entirely. I shall die not knowing  
How near a madman I had then become,  
Or whether there were devils. Tell yourself,  
And let there be no doubt, that I destroyed her  
While I believed I was destroying you.  
It was too dark for me to see just then  
What I was doing—for my only light  
Was fire that was in me; and fire like that  
Is fire that has no light. You hear me saying  
That I did this, and that my first exploit  
In Sharon, on returning, was to stand  
At Agatha's grave and thank God she was there.  
She was away from you, and as much mine  
As yours—or my devouring self-defeat  
Would so believe. I would go there at night  
And talk to her. She was the only thing  
I ever wanted that I could not have.  
You took her from me, when she was almost . . .

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Malory, if you care to open that drawer,  
You will find in it the same implement  
That you brought yesterday."

Nightingale's voice  
Was trembling for the second time that day,  
And then was silent. Malory left his chair  
And moved away again towards the window  
That looked on those unceasing little waves  
Which had no rest. They would have rest sometime,  
And when they rested they would not be waves.  
Should he be Malory when he was resting,  
He thought, or only as much of earth and air  
And water as there was of him to be moving  
Again somewhere and to be something else.  
He had almost forgotten Nightingale,  
Who had said little to him that was new,  
And nothing that was false. He had been false  
Until it was no matter what else he was,  
Or what he had to say, or what he did,  
Said Malory; and that was easy saying  
For one in whom even hate had now no home.

And was that all, and had he come in vain  
So far to find where vengeance was not his?  
Those flashing waves were life; they were not death,  
Or sleep. The power that made them flash was power,  
It was not nothing. It was like a wish

## *Part Fifth*

To live, and an awakening wish to serve.  
It was not what he found in Agatha's  
Untroubled smile or in her living eyes  
Between him and her grave; it was, perhaps,  
More like what he saw now while she was coming,  
With the same eyes, and the same smile in them,  
Between him and a sea that had no rest,  
And for another moment while she flashed  
And faded between him and Nightingale,  
Whose eyes were those of a man trying to smile  
Because he was to die.

“Never forget,  
Malory,” said his ruminating host,  
“What an unvisualized and writhing city  
Of pain and fear a million men and women  
Would make, who are not well and have too long  
To live, and strangely are not ready to die.  
I don't know what a million men and women  
Are worth to you, yet I can estimate,  
Remotely, what equipment and resource  
Is in them of indignant uselessness,  
And misery too merciless and too harsh,  
And undeserved, to be explainable  
To eyes of earth. I have the eminence  
Of my deserts, and therefore am exempt  
From your attention. Now go for a walk,  
Down by the shore, where you may find some shells

*The Glory of the Nightingales*

That once were filled with unaspiring life,  
And leave me to inhabit my grand mansion,  
Which I have always wanted, by the sea."

## VI

**W**ITH his word that he would stay until tomorrow,  
 He obeyed; and with a willingness unknown  
 For so long that he was loth to recognize it  
 As a wish to breathe again the breath of life,  
 He could see, like fallen walls of an old city  
 In a plain where there was only sand and death,  
 Dead emptiness of hate and desolation  
 That he would not recall. He would forget it,  
 And by it be forgotten. He was tired  
 Of deserts, and had found at last that his,  
 Where he had groped and stumbled for so long,  
 Had been too barren a place even for death  
 To dwell in. Death had abandoned Malory,  
 Or was not yet his friend. There was no friend  
 Anywhere, and he saw no need of one.  
 If glimmerings that attended him today  
 Were intimations of a coming light,  
 He was to be alone for a long time,  
 And with no friends in sight. If he deserved them,  
 Or if his light required them in his picture,  
 No doubt they would be there eventually.  
 But for the present they were far away,  
 And better so. He would have little for them,  
 Or for the solace of their wakeful ears.  
 Their presence would be kindness at his heels,  
 And underfoot, imploring to be stepped on.  
 If in the way, and angry if obeyed.

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

There was a time for friends that was not now.  
If he should find a way back to himself,  
His enemies, long pursued and long forsaken,  
Would be his friends; for death, living in them,  
Would be his life. There was no answer yet.  
His fancies came and went, and were as vain  
As a dumb wave that he saw burrowing  
Among weed-muffled rocks to find a sound  
That was not there. From where he stood, alone,  
A few rocks and the sea was all there was  
Of a life-burdened world except himself;  
And he was not yet small enough to carry  
A whole world's burden. There was hope in that,  
If there was none in those recurrent waves  
That came and lifted always the same weeds,  
Until they were like coarse and floating hair  
Of giant women drowned and turned to stone,  
And fell to rise again to the same end  
That was no end, and always came to nothing.  
In clouds that came and went, there was at least  
A sort of promise, for they came and went;  
But here there was a promise of nothing else  
Than waves and waves, and then waves, and more waves,  
That went and came. There was nothing in them for men  
Whose imminent need to live was a parole  
And a probation; and there was less for men  
Who came from Sharon yesterday to die.  
He found an inland way among the trees

## *Part Sixth*

More to his fancy. They would not go from him  
And then come back. He was tired of things that moved  
And did no more. He had been one of them  
So long, for the achievement of so little,  
That he would rest—who had no power to rest.  
He should not rest again until he died,  
Which was a thing to know. If Nightingale  
Told him of what was his, he would deny it,  
And say it was not his. Nothing was his,  
Which was another thing for him to know.

In the afternoon, with Nightingale before him,  
Silent, in the same room, in the same chair,  
Malory found the task of saying nothing  
Only a somewhat easier one than speech.  
Having his wits, he was uncomfortable  
With Nightingale, who was aware of more  
Than would have been a pleasure to explain  
Of Malory's constraint. If in his eyes  
There was a stricken willingness to smile,  
With any encouragement, he could find none  
In Malory's face, and said, indifferently,  
"I'm glad you keep your word, and are to stay  
With me until tomorrow. I like doctors,  
Lawyers, and criminals, and all true men  
Who keep their word; also those competent  
Grand-nephews of Jehu who drive our cars.  
If you are willing, we'll have one of them

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Here now, and we'll go rolling. With two slaves  
To put me in and take me out again,  
I do a deal of rolling, and feel the world  
Rolling away—though you may not believe it.  
For why should you believe me, Malory,  
Whatever I say? And yet, you may as well.  
I'll say a little more while we are going,  
And seeing the world the Lord has made so fair  
For our defeats and victories. *Vae victis*.  
Pronounce it as you think a noble Roman  
Might once have uttered it, and say it twice.  
I've an impatient and laborious ear  
For listening while I ride, so you need say  
Only those words, and say them to yourself.  
We shall have time to scan familiar scenes  
Again, and I shall not be long in saying  
All I shall say."

Nightingale's word was good,  
And he was not long saying to Malory  
As much as was required of him to hear,  
And hear without reply. "I shall not know  
What you are trying to do if you insist  
On argument, or on immediate speech.  
So, Malory, put yourself aside, and hold  
Your scientific tongue. Imprison it  
Behind your teeth and say it is a tiger—  
A thing to do a fractious deal of harm

## *Part Sixth*

If it goes wild. Besides, I have no ears,  
And I am rather helpless in some ways.  
Remember that; also conserve a thought  
Of millions who have never heard of you  
Or me, and of more millions who are coming.  
So for God's sake be quiet, and admire  
The outside of God's world, which is not bad.  
Perhaps we may as well not go to Sharon  
Today. Perhaps we may as well not go  
Tomorrow. I shall go there, before long,  
For there the Nightingales have always gone  
When they have done their singing."

Malory stood

Once more by the wide window, where he saw  
Those tumbling and unceasing little waves  
Until it seemed that he had seen them there  
Since he was born; and they were not his waves.  
Yet surely they were flashing with a language  
That was important and inevitable;  
There were too many of them to be dismissed  
By one whose life was only a little more  
Of time than one of theirs. If theirs were lost,  
Why should not his be lost and be as nothing  
In a more stormy and unsounded ocean  
Than ever filled the valleys of a world  
For men to weigh and measure? There was time  
For living in himself and on himself,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

Like a thought-eating worm, and dying of it  
Unthought of, or for life larger than that,  
Larger than self, and one that was not death.  
There was avengingly not time for both;  
And his was not the least of wavering lives  
That had not stood when shaken. He was not  
The least of summoned men who had served well,  
And, having lost themselves in a great darkness,  
Had not returned and were no longer sought  
Among the missing, and no longer missed.  
Had he returned? Was this the light again,  
Or was a darkness worse than any other,  
A darkness only felt, deceiving him?  
He was not sure of anything since that ride,  
Except that it was over, and that hours  
Made days and years, and not so many of them  
As there were waves.

“Well, Malory, by my soul!”  
Said Nightingale. “If I’ve a memory left  
Of anything pleasant, and a right to say so,  
That was a pleasant ride. You like my ocean  
Better, perhaps; yet even if it were yours,  
You would not wear a window out with watching  
The same one thing, and always the same thing.  
I am the watcher who can swear to that.  
We’ve had a ride; and since you are still here,  
The prisoner of your word, we’ll have some drink—

## *Part Sixth*

Which is forbidden. I shall not die of it.  
If I should die just now, I should be going  
A little too soon. You, a benign pursuer  
Of hidden miseries, and of hidden means  
To rid a more or less debatable race  
Of their pernicious presence, are excused  
From caring, or trying to care, whether I die  
Tomorrow or today. There are more reasons  
For your not caring than I'll reiterate;  
There are more reasons than there may be days  
For me to say them over and be sorry  
For being as I have been. For a man with eyes  
To see more surely what there was before him  
Than eyes of the less fortunate may see,  
I have not seen so well as men supposed,  
And may be still supposing. Twice in my life  
I have been blind; and that was a bad matter:  
Once when I sank my judgment and your money  
Into that most unhappy hole in the ground;  
Once when I kicked my decency and honor  
In after them. My purpose is to say  
So clearly what I did that I shall never  
Say it again. I'm sure you understand  
Everything now, except that I should do it;  
And sometime when you ask a streptococcus  
Why it's a streptococcus, you may learn  
All that I know of a dead Nightingale  
That will not die. I'll say no more of devils,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

But out of all this ruin, I'll save a few  
Opinions and ideas for the small profit  
Of having them. I have not seen the devil,  
But I have seen sufficient of his work  
Not to make light of him, or to invite him  
Into my house again. The ruin I made  
Is not all ruin, unless you make it so.  
But if you ask why Agatha was chosen  
To be the innocent means and sacrifice,  
You will ask more than me before you know.  
I shall not tell you. I am too blind for that.  
I was not blind at first with Agatha—  
I was almost . . . But what's the use of time,  
If it will not be done when it's all gone?  
We were not going back, but Agatha  
Was calling me; and when she calls, I go—  
And do not find her. There is little for me  
To find, wherever I look. My blemishes  
And evils now are mostly a sad trash  
Of memory to be swept and blown away,  
Or blown so as to leave you a clear path.  
You and the world are in a partnership  
Too large and too impersonal to include  
A presence of sick hate. You owe yourself  
To your unhappy millions in your city  
Of cries and silences and suffering hope.  
And there are many millions more to be,  
And to be stricken. The world is not all pain,

## *Part Sixth*

But there is pain enough ahead of it,  
And in it, to ensure the resurrection  
Of you and your awakening faculties  
For the few hours that we call years of life  
That you may find remaining. There's a bell  
Ringing, and not for you. We are not subtle  
Today, Malory; there's hardly need of it.  
I hope it's not another one come to kill me,  
For you and Absalom, the Lord's appointed—  
Who lived a while in heaven before he died,  
And was a king of earth, having what he wanted—  
Have so enriched me with an overplus  
Of armament that I shall need no more  
To scare my ghosts and enemies away,  
If one day there should be too many of them.  
I'll fancy rather it's a man of law—  
This time; and it's as well for you to know him.  
You are not fearing lawyers; not today.  
Wherefore, we'll have him in. He's a good lawyer,  
And does not know that I'm not a good man.  
He knows too many others who are worse.  
He has no knowledge of the lights I had  
And could not follow; and if he knew of them,  
And of the several ways where I've been lost,  
Most likely he would not believe in them,  
Having no time for visions or inventions.  
Another day you may enlighten him  
Somewhat, as you think best. When you are here,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

You and your microbes, and your apparatus,  
Your staff, your patients, and your God knows what,  
You will know why it was this house was built.  
A knowledge that was out of my possession  
Till yesterday is a good knowledge now  
For you, and who shall say how many more?  
A pleasant home for microbes, I should call it,  
Though it has never been a home for me."

The lawyer's entrance came to no long writing  
Of a long story. It was all revealed  
In words that held a latent increment  
Larger than any estate. It was not land  
And houses, and abundant maintenance,  
That Malory found when he was given to read  
The text of Nightingale's last composition,  
But an imperious, fixed, and lonely way  
Of life in service. There was no escape  
From the long sentence of his usefulness.  
He was a slave now in a city of pain,  
A pullulating place that was all places,  
And soon or late the last abode of man  
Till his departure. There was no fear of joy  
To be a stain on his inheritance,  
Except the lonely joy of being alive  
In a good servitude, and of not being  
Obscurely and unintelligibly wasted.  
Now he could say what Agatha may have meant,

## *Part Sixth*

Between him and her grave, when she was there  
To welcome him with an untroubled smile  
On his dark road—one that would still be gray,  
For him, and endless, if he found no light  
For others. He was alone, and would remain so,  
Until he found more light.

“So much for that,”  
Said Nightingale; and having signed his name,  
He smiled at Malory and the man of law  
With purpose and approval. “It’s all done,”  
He said, “and I’ve a planet off my shoulders.  
I was tired of being Atlas; for my world,  
Though it was no enormous one, was heavy.  
And now that you two estimable agents  
Of my deliverance are not unacquainted,  
I should be glad if you would leave me here  
A while to be alone, and not to talk.  
Be sorry for an ominous example,  
And let yourselves so live that you may not  
Be living on wheels one day in a large house,  
Alone—not even if you have always wanted  
A large house by the sea. You will come back,  
But I’ll shake hands with you for your assistance,  
And wish you a good ride. This is a day  
For riding, and a good day for some thought  
On my part. It is not like every day.”

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

They left him smiling, and, as Malory knew,  
In more pain than his body alone could feel.  
They rode as easy strangers, having no food  
For malice or mistrust. If one of them  
Acknowledged inwardly a futile envy  
Of such an unforeseen and unexplained  
Cascade of shining fortune for another,  
Nothing was to be done to a man's name  
Written by him whose name was his to write.  
They rode, and had but little to say of him,  
Who, seemingly, had said everything for once  
And all, and on a small array of paper.  
For an hour they rode, in the late afternoon,  
With trees and fields and houses on one side,  
And with an ocean on the other, darker  
As daylight faded, and with smaller waves  
That had a slower motion as they rose  
And broke more quietly now, and made less foam.  
They told of a beginning of long silence  
That night, and were somehow, for Malory,  
Like toiling, weary people, who were soon  
To have some rest before they toiled again,  
And for a season were not to be waves.  
Having each his personal fancy for companion,  
They rode, saying what the old amenities  
Required as best they might, and they came back;  
And when they came to Nightingale's, they rolled  
Quietly in on crushed blue stone to find

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

A strange house not so quiet, and a stranger  
Within that was invisible, and a shape  
Of someone that was no one, still in his chair,  
With Malory's pistol on the floor beside him.  
What Malory once had called his only wealth  
Had given him wealth to serve, and without waiting.  
Nightingale had said nothing about waiting,  
And Malory had known why.

Alone that evening

With all there was to see of Nightingale,  
Lying at last unharassed and untorn,  
Malory sat with fate, and gazed at it.  
“Well, Nightingale, you are quiet enough now,”  
He thought; “and you have earned now, in your way,  
Or in another way that was not yours,  
The privilege of a sleep—if you are sleeping.  
You have bound me hand and foot, body and brain,  
To service. I owe to Agatha, and to you,  
All that I owe mankind. It's all an owing,  
For me, and shall be one till I have paid  
To man my sum of knowledge, which is little,  
God knows, though not so little as I should be  
For hiding it, or for throwing it away.  
The light you could not follow is not mine,  
Which is my light—a safer one for me,  
No doubt, than if it threw a gleam too far  
To show my steps. There is no grief in me

## *Part Sixth*

For your release, and there is no hate now  
For Agatha's. If I could bring her back,  
By calling her, to live and die again,  
I should be silent; for I cannot know  
The pain there was that was not hers to suffer,  
Because she was not here. I cannot know,  
For certain, that your way, dark as it was,  
Was not the necessary way of life.  
There was in yours at least a buried light  
For time and man; and science, living in time,  
May find at last a gleam nearer than yours,  
For those who are not born to follow it  
Before it has been found. There is, meanwhile,  
A native light for others, but none born  
Of penitence, or of man's fear to die.  
Fear is not light, and you were never afraid.  
You were blind, Nightingale, but never afraid;  
And even when you were blind, you may have seen,  
Darkly, where you were going, and where you are.  
For where you are tonight, there was your place;  
And your dark glass is broken."

He looked up  
From Nightingale to see, against the wall,  
Dimly, and on dim wheels, a dead man's chair  
With no man in it. Here was the same room  
Where fate was waiting for him yesterday—  
With a presence now of death to make it empty,

## *The Glory of the Nightingales*

And the difference of a day to make it his.  
Here was a place where gold would buy no sorrow,  
And the embellished rhetoric of regret  
Would soon be words forgotten, and no more.  
There was nothing left of Nightingale but silence,  
And a cold weight of mystery that was man,  
And was no longer man—as waves outside  
Were cold and still, and were no longer waves.  
There was nothing left for Malory but remembrance  
Of the best that was behind him, and life struggling  
In the darkness of a longer way before him  
Than a way there was from anywhere to Sharon—  
A darkness where his eyes were to be guided  
By light that would be his, and Nightingale's.













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